



## Communist University Introductions

*These texts may be used as “openings to discussion” of the original reading texts that are supplied by the CU. They are not intended to be authoritative or conclusive. They are contributions to discussion like any other such contributions. The introductions are not a substitute for the reading texts.*

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### No Woman, No Revolution, Part 0



[Charlotte Maxeke, 1874-1939](#)

## Introduction to “No Woman, No Revolution” – the Course

The efforts of women of the privileged classes to acquire rights that were increasingly being gained by the male members of their class, notably the right to own property and the right to vote, are called feminism.

This struggle existed even under feudalism, and it grew stronger as the bourgeois class began to assert itself and to become hegemonic. The feminists put forward reformist demands that bourgeois society was able, and often willing, to concede to bourgeois women.

This course, “No Woman, No Revolution”, is not designed to present a full history of feminism, but rather to pick up the story of feminism at the point where contradiction arises between bourgeois feminism, and the interests of the women of the proletarian class.

This contradiction manifested itself in the second half of the nineteenth century, as a consequence of the proletarian revolutionary movements associated in the first place with Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. It is found, not only in the realm of theory, but also in the world of practice, notably in the First and Second Internationals.

This course has been worked on for many years. It now presents a strong view of the historical development of revolutionary thought about women, and of revolutionary organisation among women, from the mid-nineteenth century to the present.

The roots of the course are in the last decade of Karl Marx’s life. The German Social Democratic Party was founded in 1875, Bebel published his “Women and Socialism” in 1879, and Marx was studying Morgan’s “Ancient Society” prior to his death in 1883. Engels took up Marx’s manuscript and worked it into a book, “The Origin of the Family, Private Property and The State”, published in 1884, which is our first and still our greatest text.

The course therefore follows the pioneering development of thought about women and revolution within the parties of the proletarian interest, from the time of Karl Marx, who died in 1883; Frederick Engels, who survived Marx by 12 years until 1895; and Clara Zetkin, who was born in 1857, was already active in the labour movement in 1874 (the year that Charlotte Maxeke was born) at the age of 17. Zetkin lived until 1933.

It then proceeds via the work of Rosa Luxemburg and Alexandra Kollontai, to a high point with Vladimir Lenin, and then to the setback (for women) that was the 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress of the Third International (the Comintern).

The course then picks up the story in South Africa, where in the same decade that saw the foundation of the ANC, the ICU and the CPSA, Charlotte Maxeke [pictured above] established the Bantu Women's League in 1918, the fore-runner of many subsequent liberatory and revolutionary women's organisations.

The course problematises the relationship between attempts to found a mass-membership, dedicated women's organisation in South Africa, led by the working women; and the countervailing determination of the liberation movement, the ANC, and its Women's League, to tolerate no potential rival.

The course examines theoretical works dealing with structure and structurelessness, gender and patriarchy, and the close relationship between bourgeois feminism and bourgeois post-modernist philosophy.

The course finishes with writings from the SACP (Jenny Schreiner and Blade Nzimande) and speeches from the ANC (Jacob Zuma).

[International Woman's Day](#) (8<sup>th</sup> of March each year) was proposed by [Clara Zetkin](#), a contemporary and comrade of [Alexandra Kollontai](#), at the Second International Women's Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark in 1910. The first International Women's Day was observed in 1911.

Feminism had a considerable history by that time. In 1910 the campaign for votes for women was at its height in some countries. But the bourgeois feminism of those days was being challenged by the revolutionaries, as it still is today. This course, "No Woman, No Revolution", is motivated by revolutionary considerations like those of Zetkin and Kollontai.

A successful revolution that mobilised only half of the available support would be inconceivable. The half of the population that is female must be as fully involved in any revolution as the men are, or else there will be no revolution. Our series is designed to problematise the question of women as a force in South Africa's revolution, in the specific conditions pertaining in this year of 2015. It will focus on the necessity of organising working women as a mass.

- **To download the full No Woman, No Revolution course in PDF files, [please click here](#)**



Family, Property, State

## The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State

Karl Marx was a philosopher by training, and a writer all his life. But the only full work he ever wrote about philosophy was his doctoral thesis on the Ancient Greek philosopher, Epicurus, several years before the birth of Marxism.

Marx's working life was dedicated to the restoration of humanity to itself. This was the motivation for his greatest work, "Capital". Marx regarded the relation between men and women to be the essence of humanity. He never wrote a book about it, but in his papers at the time of his death in 1883 were the notes that his friend Engels quickly turned into "[The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State](#)". And this book turns out to be, not only original, but indispensable.

August Bebel's book "Woman and Socialism" came out five years earlier, in 1879, but it is not a satisfactory starting point. Engels' "Origin of the Family" on the other hand, has constant relevance. It describes women's place in society in the complete context of the origin of property, class struggle, and the instrument that defends property and dominates class struggle: The State.

The special contribution of "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State" is that it shows the common, interdependent origin of private property and the State; the fall of the women into the oppressive condition which they subsequently continued to suffer; and the institutions of money, writing and law. This original, revolutionary break marked the end of pre-history and the beginning

of history, which as Marx and Engels had noted at the beginning of the Communist Manifesto of 1848, was from that time on “a history of class struggles”.

The transition from prehistoric communism took place a long time ago in some parts of the world. In Egypt and Mesopotamia (Iraq) it may have happened more than five thousand years ago. In most other parts it was a much more recent phenomenon, and in some places the fall of the women may in some ways still not yet be complete.

The simultaneous nature of the triple catastrophe (property, state and downfall of women) means that the remedy in all three matters will likewise have to be simultaneous, meaning also that:

The urgent abolition or “withering away” of the State is a woman’s issue. The socialist project is a woman’s project.

Communism is a necessity for women. The reversal of the downfall of the women can only be achieved by the simultaneous abolition of property and the State. Likewise, the abolition of property and the State cannot be achieved without the conscious restoration of women to their proper place in human society. All three goals have to be achieved together. The three goals are actually the same goal, and the name of it is communism.

This, the beginning of the course, therefore also provides the conclusion of the course: that there is no liberation available to working women under capitalism. Communism is where the contradictions will be resolved.

- **The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Engels, Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, C9, Barbarism and Civilisation.](#)**
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[Clara Zetkin, 1857-1933](#)

## Socialist Victory Only With Proletarian Woman

Clara Zetkin's speech at the Party Congress of the Social Democratic Party of Germany at Gotha on 16 October 1896 sets the theme which will provide the backbone of this ten-part course.

Says Zetkin:

*"The granting of political equality to women does not change the actual balance of power. The proletarian woman ends up in the proletarian, the bourgeois woman in the bourgeois camp. We must not let ourselves be fooled by Socialist trends in the bourgeois women's movement which last only as long as bourgeois women feel oppressed."*

*"We must not conduct special women's propaganda, but Socialist agitation among women."*

Zetkin continues:

*“Therefore the liberation struggle of the proletarian woman cannot be similar to the struggle that the bourgeois woman wages against the male of her class. On the contrary, it must be a joint struggle with the male of her class against the entire class of capitalists. She does not need to fight against the men of her class in order to tear down the barriers which have been raised against her participation in the free competition of the market place. Capitalism’s need to exploit and the development of the modern mode of production totally relieves her of having to fight such a struggle. On the contrary, new barriers need to be erected against the exploitation of the proletarian woman. Her rights as wife and mother need to be restored and permanently secured. Her final aim is not the free competition with the man, but the achievement of the political rule of the proletariat. The proletarian woman fights hand in hand with the man of her class against capitalist society. To be sure, she also agrees with the demands of the bourgeois women’s movement, but she regards the fulfilment of these demands simply as a means to enable that movement to enter the battle, equipped with the same weapons, alongside the proletariat.”*

The German Social Democratic Party was the leading centre of this kind of thinking from before the death of Marx in 1883 until the Russian Revolution in 1917. Clara Zetkin was its principal leader in this field and by 1896 she had been editor of the socialist women’s newspaper **Die Gleichheit** (“equality”) for five years. We will return to “Die Gleichheit” in the next item.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Socialist Victory Only With Proletarian Woman, Clara Zetkin, 1896.](#)
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## Working-class Women's Political History

The general form of this course, like all of the Communist University courses, is that it is a selected set of original texts by revolutionary writers. Unlike most, the writer of this (attached and downloadable) text is a scholar not otherwise known to us. Her name is Janine Booth. The article was found on the Trotskyist web site of a British publication called “Workers’ Liberty”. We thank Janine Booth.

Booth’s work assists us with a narrative of the years from the founding of the German Social Democratic Party in 1875, when Karl Marx and Frederick Engels were both still alive, alert, active and writing, up until the time, thirty to forty years later, when the initiative began to pass from the German Party to Lenin’s Bolsheviks.

The revolutionary activities of the communists were prominent at different times in Britain, France, Belgium, Germany, Italy and Russia, among many other countries. In the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup>, these revolutionary activities were much more massive in Germany than anywhere else; and it was in the German language, and in the revolutionary practice of the German communists, that the organised movement for the advancement of proletarian women, as part of the revolutionary struggle for communism, got under way and first reached a high stage of explicit development.

In our course we represent this period with singular texts from Engels, Zetkin, Kollontai, Luxemburg and Lenin. Some of the history of the period can be seen in these texts through the eyes of these revolutionary participants. Booth’s text can



help us to step back and think about some of the other participants, like August Bebel and Emma Ihrer, on the forms of organisation that the German Party used, and on the means of propaganda that were employed, such as the periodical founded by Ihrer and mainly edited by Zetkin, Die Gleichheit ("Equality").

We have to take Booth's word for it on the numbers and on most of the detail that she relates. We do not have an Internet archive of Die Gleichheit, or even a single article from it. Booth's article as reproduced here has no references or bibliography. These are some of the reasons why, in general, we have used original writings.

In the case of this article, some of it has been removed for the sake of brevity, and where the points made are covered by our other material. Remarks about Rosa Luxemburg's alleged indifference towards women's particular position in society are less useful than Luxemburg's own text, for example, which we give in the next part. Comrades can go to the web site to read Booth's full article, if they wish.

Part of what our course is asserting is that the proletarian women's cause has been the occasion of major historical, and also comprises a substantial body of thought. In doing so we are overturning the tacit and sometimes explicit historiography of the bourgeois feminists. We are identifying our own struggles against bourgeois feminism with the struggles that took place in this earlier time, between the days of Marx and Engels, and the days of Luxemburg and Lenin.

The above introduces [German Socialism and the 'woman question', Booth, 2005](#).

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## **1910: INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**

In agreement with the class-conscious, political and trade union organizations of the proletariat of their respective countries, the Socialist women of all countries will hold each year a Women's Day, whose foremost purpose it must be to aid the attainment of women's suffrage. This demand must be handled in conjunction with the entire women's question according to Socialist precepts.

The Women's Day must have an international character and is to be prepared carefully.

**Clara Zetkin, Rathe Duncker and Comrades, August 27, 1910**

*[From a proposal to the Second International Women's Conference at Copenhagen, August 27, 1910. Die Gleichheit Stuttgart, August 29, 1910.]*

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[Alexandra Kollontai, 1872-1952](#)

## No Woman Question?

The proletarian revolution is inconceivable without the involvement of the more than 50% of the population which is female. Bourgeois feminism cannot lead women towards proletarian revolution. Resolution of the contradictions that oppress women cannot be achieved under capitalism. These are the general and compelling circumstance that motivates this course, No Woman, No Revolution.

[Alexandra Kollontai](#) understood the limits of bourgeois feminism very well. In 1908 she wrote:

*“The [bourgeois] feminists seek equality in the framework of the existing class society, in no way do they attack the basis of this society.”* (The full document is attached and the download is linked below).

*“Where, then, is that general ‘woman question’? Where is that unity of tasks and aspirations about which the feminists have so much to say? A*

*sober glance at reality shows that such unity does not and cannot exist,” wrote Kollontai.*

*“The feminists declare themselves to be on the side of social reform, and some of them even say they are in favour of socialism — in the far distant future, of course — but they are not intending to struggle in the ranks of the working class for the realisation of these aims. The best of them believe, with a naive sincerity, that once the deputies’ seats are within their reach they will be able to cure the social sores which have in their view developed because men, with their inherent egoism, have been masters of the situation. However good the intentions of individual groups of feminists towards the proletariat, whenever the question of class struggle has been posed they have left the battlefield in a fright. They find that they do not wish to interfere in alien causes, and prefer to retire to their bourgeois liberalism which is so comfortably familiar,” says Kollontai.*

Kollontai was writing at the height of modern feminism’s first blooming, at the time of the [“Suffragette”](#) campaigns for votes for women in capitalist countries, which votes [hardly existed](#) at the time. Kollontai published her pamphlet [“The Social Basis of the Woman Question”](#) (attached) in 1909.

Kollontai saw two camps. In one camp were the feminists, who from Kollontai’s point of view were bourgeois feminists, by definition. In the other camp were women who were proletarian, or else partisans of the proletariat. She distinguished between these two camps as follows:

*“However apparently radical the demands of the feminists, one must not lose sight of the fact that the feminists cannot, on account of their class position, fight for that fundamental transformation of the contemporary economic and social structure of society without which the liberation of women cannot be complete.*

*“If in certain circumstances the short-term tasks of women of all classes coincide, the final aims of the two camps, which in the long term determine the direction of the movement and the tactics to be used, differ sharply. While for the feminists the achievement of equal rights with men in the framework of the contemporary capitalist world represents a sufficiently concrete end in itself, equal rights at the present time are, for the proletarian women, only a means of advancing the struggle against the economic slavery of the working class. The feminists see men as the main enemy, for men have unjustly seized all rights and privileges for themselves, leaving women only chains and duties. For them a victory is*

won when a prerogative previously enjoyed exclusively by the male sex is conceded to the 'fair sex'.

*"Proletarian women have a different attitude. They do not see men as the enemy and the oppressor; on the contrary, they think of men as their comrades, who share with them the drudgery of the daily round and fight with them for a better future. The woman and her male comrade are enslaved by the same social conditions; the same hated chains of capitalism oppress their will and deprive them of the joys and charms of life. It is true that several specific aspects of the contemporary system lie with double weight upon women, as it is also true that the conditions of hired labour sometimes turn working women into competitors and rivals to men. But in these unfavourable situations, the working class knows who is guilty."*

*"The working woman is first and foremost a member of the working class."*

Having thus strongly made her fundamental case, Kollontai proceeds to discuss "Marriage and the Problem of the Family". This is where, as Frederick Engels had noted a quarter of a century before Kollontai in his "[Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State](#)", capitalism corresponds to the oppression of women, arising from the ancient history of property, still continuing in the present time.

Engels demonstrated that the form of marriage in any society had always coincided with the relations of production. Kollontai, discussing the work of the bourgeois feminist Ellen Key, comes to the point of asking, in the second of the two following paragraphs: "Does the family wither away?"

*"Ellen Key's devotion to the obligations of maternity and the family forces her to give an assurance that the isolated family unit will continue to exist even in a society transformed along socialist lines. The only change, as she sees it, will be that all the attendant elements of convenience or of material gain will be excluded from the marriage union, which will be concluded according to mutual inclinations, without rituals or formalities — love and marriage will be truly synonymous. But the isolated family unit is the result of the modern individualistic world, with its rat-race, its pressures, its loneliness; the family is a product of the monstrous capitalist system. And yet Key hopes to bequeath the family to socialist society! Blood and kinship ties at present often serve, it is true, as the only support in life, as the only refuge in times of hardship and misfortune. But will they be morally or socially necessary in the future? Key does not answer this*

question. She has too loving a regard for the “ideal family”, this egoistic unit of the middle bourgeoisie to which the devotees of the bourgeois structure of society look with such reverence.

*“But it is not only the talented though erratic Ellen Key who loses her way in the social contradictions. There is probably no other question about which socialists themselves are so little in agreement as the question of marriage and the family. Were we to try and organise a survey among socialists, the results would most probably be very curious. Does the family wither away? or are there grounds for believing that the family disorders of the present are only a transitory crisis? Will the present form of the family be preserved in the future society, or will it be buried with the modern capitalist system? These are questions which might well receive very different answers. ...”*

Kollontai answers her own questions, thus:

*“...the social influences are so complex and their interactions so diverse that it is impossible to foretell what the relationships of the future, when the whole system has fundamentally been changed, will be like.*

*“...ritual marriage and the compulsive isolated family are doomed to disappear.”*

To finish, Kollontai returns to the class question and the conflict of interest between the proletarian and the bourgeois feminists.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The Social Basis of the Woman Question, Kollontai, 1909.](#)
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## Rosa Luxemburg on Women

Rosa Luxemburg was a major revolutionary figure in history, ranking with her contemporaries, Lenin and Gramsci, as one of the supreme pioneers of modern communist theory and practice.

Rosa Luxemburg wrote many powerful things. At least two of them have continuing currency as major, canonical “classics” of Marxism. These are “Reform or Revolution?”, and “The Mass Strike”.

There is a well-stocked archive of Rosa Luxemburg’s work, translated into English, on the Marxists Internet Archive.

Luxemburg has been accused (by Janine Booth, for example) of being indifferent to the particular position of proletarian women under capitalism. As much as with Lenin, or perhaps even more so, it is hard (but not impossible) to isolate a selection of texts of Luxemburg and say: this is what Luxemburg wrote about women.

The attached text is a big exception to the difficulty of finding a “Luxemburg on women” text. It shows that Luxemburg was highly aware and concerned about the way that capitalist relations bore down upon women in particular.

It begins by quoting the question framed in 1889 by Emma Ihrer, the founder in 1890 of “*Die Arbeiterin*” (the woman worker) magazine: “Why are there no organizations for working women in Germany?”

“*Die Arbeiterin*” became “*Die Gleichheit*” in 1891, and the editorship passed to Clara Zetkin.

Rosa Luxemburg brings her exceptional powers of expression to bear upon the topic that she so rarely covered, and in the process leaves no doubt that she was fully aware of everything that was at stake.

The question “Why are there no organizations for working women?” is still a crucial one in South Africa now, as much as it was in the Germany of 1889 or 1912.

Luxemburg is scathing about the feminists: “*Most of those bourgeois women who act like lionesses in the struggle against “male prerogatives” would trot like docile lambs in the camp of conservative and clerical reaction if they had suffrage. Indeed, they would certainly be a good deal more reactionary than the male part of their class,*” she writes.

Luxemburg knows both the purpose, and the limits, of democracy: “*Fighting for women’s suffrage, we will also hasten the coming of the hour when the present society falls in ruins under the hammer strokes of the revolutionary proletariat,*” she concludes.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Women’s Suffrage and Class Struggle, Luxemburg, 1912.](#)
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Research

## Research Sources pre-1914

The attached and linked document, “The International Socialist Women's Conference”, by Gerd Calleson, is from a Friedrich Ebert Foundation web site, in a section called “Sources on the Development of the Socialist International (1907-1919)”.

With some slight reservations, detailed below, it is not a major concern to us that this is a “Social Democratic” web site that holds to a different version of history than the communists, following Lenin, Luxemburg and others, do.

Our concern is to look for scholarly sources that may have researched the field, so that we may get indications of more empirical facts, and pick up references to more of the original sources. In the last part, we used what may be a Trotskyist article by Janine Booth, because Booth had researched the material and gave some account of it.

In this summary by Gerd Calleson, it can be seen that there are further documents one could pursue, but overall, it supports the view that the documents we have used, from Engels, Zetkin, Kollontai and Luxemburg (and soon to come, Lenin), are indeed the crucial ones, which together give a good account of the state of affairs in the working women's movement and among the bourgeois feminists of the period from the beginning of the modern proletarian movement in the mid-nineteenth centuries, up to the split that took place in 1914.

Gerd Calleson does not deal directly with the split, but the whole title, including its reference to the “Socialist International (1907-1919)”, appears to endorse the

reformist view that nothing really happened in 1914, except that the communists somehow, inexplicably, left.

More to the point of our course, Calleson refers to “Zetkin's opinion that women workers were to be subsumed into the general Labour Movement”. This is a one-sided opinion of Calleson's, about Zetkin, almost saying that Zetkin could not see working women as being a distinct mass.

We have already seen in that Zetkin's opinion was not as Calleson states it here. Zetkin organised women. She organise International Women's day. She organised conferences of women, and she edited *Die Gleichheid*.

The organising of women as a distinct mass, and the political unity of working women with working men, are not contradictory principles. This was exactly Zetkin's message.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The International Socialist Women's Conference, Callesen, 2006.](#)
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## Socialism impossible without the women

*If we do not draw women into public activity, into the militia, into political life; if we do not tear women away from the deadening atmosphere of household and kitchen; then it is impossible to secure real freedom, it is impossible even to build democracy, let alone socialism.*

[Lenin, Third Letter from Afar, Zurich, March 1917](#)

The above quote from Lenin (pictured above, speaking in the open air in the revolutionary year of 1917) expresses as clearly as can be the full meaning of our series title: **“No Woman, No Revolution”**.

Yet it was not democracy in general of which Lenin wrote. In Lenin’s eyes, democracy is not an abstract value. Democracy can never be a substitute for class struggle. Democracy is an instrument of class struggle.

The following words were written by Lenin for the second anniversary of the Great October Revolution. They are included in the attached compilation, also downloadable from the link below:

*“Let the liars and hypocrites, the dull-witted and blind, the bourgeois and their supporters hoodwink the people with talk about freedom in general, about equality in general, about democracy in general.*

*"We say to the workers and peasants: Tear the masks from the faces of these liars, open the eyes of these blind ones. Ask them:*

*"Equality between what sex and what other sex?*

*"Between what nation and what other nation?*

***"Between what class and what other class?***

*"Freedom from what yoke, or from the yoke of what class? Freedom for what class?*

*"Down with the liars who are talking of freedom and equality for all, while there is an oppressed sex, while there are oppressor classes, while there is private ownership of capital, of shares, while there are the well-fed with their surplus of bread who keep the hungry in bondage. Not freedom for all, not equality for all, but a fight against the oppressors and exploiters, the abolition of every possibility of oppression and exploitation-that is our slogan!*

*"Freedom and equality for the oppressed sex!*

*"Freedom and equality for the workers, for the toiling peasants!*

*"A fight against the oppressors, a fight against the capitalists, a fight against the profiteering kulaks!*

*"That is our fighting slogan, that is our proletarian truth, the truth of the struggle against capital, the truth which we flung in the face of the world of capital with its honeyed, hypocritical, pompous phrases about freedom and equality in general, about freedom and equality for all."*

### **Lenin, Soviet Power and the Status of Women, November 1919**

In the document linked below you will also find that in September of the same year of 1919 there was already a "Fourth Moscow City Conference Of Non-Party Working Women", that was addressed by Lenin (and also by Trotsky).

When Lenin wrote in 1917 - between the two revolutions of that year, and before he had returned to Russia - that "it is impossible even to build democracy, let alone socialism" without the women, he also prefigured the National Democratic Revolution altogether, with the clear implication that democratic class struggle is a prerequisite of socialism.

In the last line of the text for this session, Lenin repeats the “No Woman, No Revolution” message:

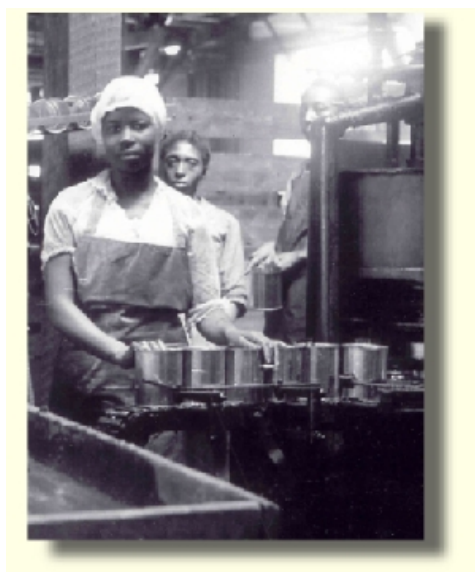
*The proletariat cannot achieve complete freedom, unless it achieves complete freedom for women.*

**Lenin, To the Working Women, February 1920**

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Lenin on Women, 1919 - 1920](#).

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### No Woman, No Revolution, Part 3a



## 3CCI gets it wrong

The Third Congress of the Communist International (3CCI), 22 June to 12 July 1921, seems to have had a peculiar flavour to it, if the documents on women from that congress (linked below) are anything to go by.

Whereas the 2CCI of the previous year had shown its awareness of the necessity of democratisation, so as to create a collective “Subject of History” out of the unorganised masses, in 1921 the situation was practically the reverse, at least as far as the women were concerned.

*“The III Congress of the Communist International is firmly opposed to any kind of separate women’s associations in the Parties and trade unions, or special women’s organisations.”*

Instead, women’s “departments” were to be formed within the communist parties to carry out various prescribed tasks in relation to women, which appeared to consist mainly of telling the women what to do.

It starts with *“educating the broad mass of working women in Communist ideas”*. This sounds like indoctrination (or “inculcation”) more than education.

In these theses on work among women, there is a lot that is more general, for example: *“The working class must adhere firmly and without hesitation to the tactics outlined by the III International.”*

These comrades had become bold on the back of the October Revolution of 1917. They felt entitled, or even duty-bound, to take charge and to send out categorical and detailed orders to the women of the world that must be obeyed strictly and without hesitation.

*“It is in the interests of the working class that women are drawn in to the organised ranks of the proletariat as it fights for Communism.”*

These comrades had no sense of anything else than “fight”, followed by communism. They had no sense of contradiction between their own prescriptive, dictatorial, unashamedly “top-down” hierarchy of power, and the withering away of the state envisaged by Lenin in *The State and Revolution* just four years earlier, meaning un-coerced self-management of and by the masses.

The democratic formation of the collective mass Subject of History was not a problem to the delegates of the 3CCI. They would supply the necessary will-power. If that meant the resurrection of the State, then so be it, they thought.

Thus it came to pass that the 3CCI decreed:

*“...that a special apparatus for conducting work among women is necessary. This apparatus must consist of departments or commissions for work among women, attached to every Party committee at all levels, from the CC of the Party right down to the urban, district or local Party committee. This decision is binding on all Parties in the Communist International.”*

The document is extremely detailed about what these “departments” are supposed to do.

What we have here is a mirror image of the feared bourgeois-feminist domination of the working women, which is the reason why generalised women’s organisations were not approved of and were effectively banned for communists by the 3CCI.

According to all this, the women will be bossed, one way or another: either by the bourgeois feminists, or by the 3CCI’s “departments”. Nothing in these 3CCI documents speaks of free-willing democratic mass organisation of and for women.

It is clear from these texts why and how the women could be left out of the National Democratic Revolutions. A separate study might reveal that the democratic vitality of the soviets as organs of popular power was already waning in the Soviet Union in 1921, and that the independence of trade unions was already under attack (but still being defended by Lenin). The New Economic Policy was coming into being.

Contradictory movements were in action at one and the same time, just as they are today. In South Africa, there are no independent democratic organisations of women, but there are departments; and this applies almost everywhere in Africa.

[Picture: woman canning worker in the USA]

- **The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Women, Principles, Declaration, Resolution, 3CCI, 1921](#).**
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## Women's Charter

On 17 April 1954, fourteen months before the [Freedom Charter](#) was adopted in Kliptown on 26 June 1955, the Federation of South African Women adopted the Women's Charter (attached, and linked below).

Following on from what we have read in the last three weeks (from Zetkin, [Kollontai](#), Luxemburg, [Lenin](#), and the [Comintern](#)), we can see the same thread re-emerging several decades later here in South Africa, as for example in this short passage from the Women's Charter:

*"We women do not form a society separate from the men. There is only one society, and it is made up of both women and men. As women we share the*

*problems and anxieties of our men, and join hands with them to remove social evils and obstacles to progress.”*

The Women’s Charter was not directed against men; nor did it hold out women as a separate class of people as compared to the men. It opposed such a separation.

Thus it placed the question of women in the mainstream, and then it went on to say:

*“It is our intention to carry out a nation-wide programme of education that will bring home to the men and women of all national groups the realisation that freedom cannot be won for any one section or for the people as a whole as long as we women are kept in bondage.”*

It is very sad to read the following, from the women of 55 years ago, knowing that it is still as true today as it was then:

*“We know what it is to keep family life going in pondokkies and shanties, or in overcrowded one-room apartments. We know the bitterness of children taken to lawless ways, of daughters becoming unmarried mothers whilst still at school, of boys and girls growing up without education, training or jobs at a living wage.”*

On the question of forms of organisation of women, a matter to which the CU will return in the next item of this part, the Women’s Charter as such has little to say, except for the following items from the list of demands:

- *For the removal of all laws that restrict free movement, that prevent or hinder the right of free association and activity in democratic organisations, and the right to participate in the work of these organisations.*
- *To build and strengthen women's sections in the National Liberatory movements, the organisation of women in trade unions, and through the peoples' varied organisation.*
- *To co-operate with all other organisations that have similar aims in South Africa as well as throughout the world.*

The 1954 Women’s Charter was non-committal on the question of women’s organisation. This was perhaps a sign that the matter was already controversial within the liberation movement. The ANC Women’s League had been founded in 1948; we will see in later sessions that the ANC WL had its way in the 1950s and

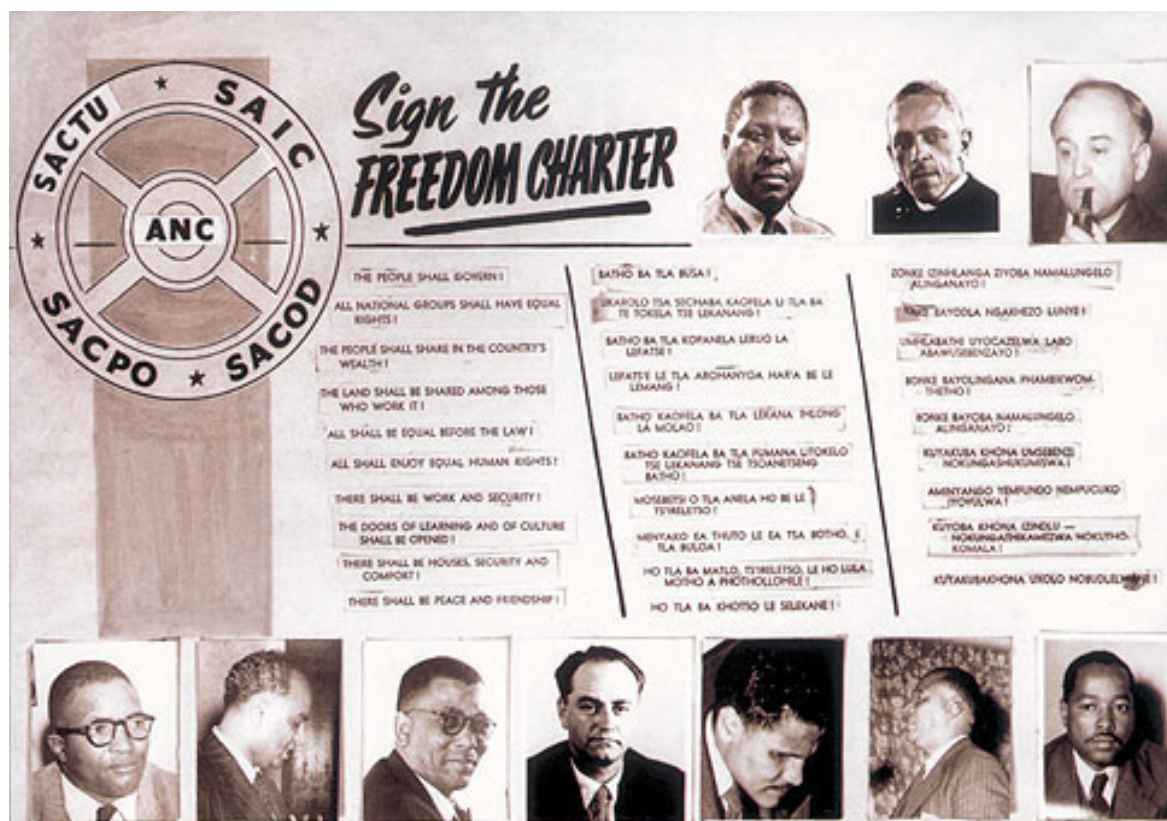
again in the 1990s and in the 2000s, obstructing the growth of a general women's democratic mass movement.

The Women's Charter of 1954 stands as a monument to South African women's determination to organise independently as women, but this is an aspiration that has yet to be realised.

[The image above is of a 1987 FEDSAW Western Cape poster, made during a period of attempted revival of the organisation]

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Women's Charter, FEDSAW Founding Conference, 1954.](#)

#### No Woman, No Revolution, Part 4a



## Freedom Charter

The Freedom Charter was adopted by five organisations in the Congress of the People on June 26<sup>th</sup> 1966, one and a half years after the adoption of the Women's Charter, seven years after the formation of the ANC Women's League, and twelve years after the admission of women to membership of the ANC in 1943.

Without the prior admission of women to the ANC, the Freedom Charter would have been unimaginable, or else it would rightly have been taken as a fraud.

Without mass organisation of the women in the ANC Women's League and in the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW), the Freedom Charter would hardly have been possible.

The five Freedom Charter signatory organisations were: SACOD, SAIC, SACPO, SACTU and the ANC.

All of them were racially-defined except SACTU, the South African Congress of Trade Unions, which was a federation of trade unions, and non-racial, like the Federation of South African Women (which was not a signatory).

But clearly, and in the light of the content of the Freedom Charter, the entire exercise amounted to a movement away from separation and towards non-racialism.

What does the Freedom Charter say about women?

- *that only a democratic state, based on the will of all the people, can secure to all their birthright without distinction of colour, race, sex or belief;*
- *Every man and woman shall have the right to vote for and to stand as a candidate for all bodies which make laws;*
- *The rights of the people shall be the same, regardless of race, colour or sex;*
- *Men and women of all races shall receive equal pay for equal work;*

The Freedom Charter does not:

- mention Gender
- mention Patriarchy
- advocate Structurelessness

The Women's Charter of 1954 also does not mention these things.

All of the signatories of the Freedom Charter were men. Does this invalidate the Freedom Charter? No, it does not.

- **The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The Freedom Charter, Congress of the People, 1955.](#)**



Formless house (Alvar Aalto)

## Tyranny of Structurelessness

As she tells us at the beginning of the attached document, the first version of Jo Freeman's "Tyranny of Structurelessness" was given as a talk more than 40 years ago, in 1970.

Part of its instant appeal is that it states "the obvious", i.e. things that those of us with even a small amount of experience know very well to be true. For example:

*"...there is no such thing as a structureless group."*

Not only is this obvious, but it is also part of scientific knowledge of human society. Humans are social creatures, and live their lives in relation with each other. These relationships always have structure, although the structure of the relationships is constantly changing.

If, as Spinoza and Engels thought, freedom is "the recognition of necessity", then freedom of relationships, and within relationships, will be greater if their structure is acknowledged, and not denied.

If, as Gramsci thought, all social groups contain their "organic intellectuals", then some of these may be good and others bad. But the remedy for bad intellectuals is not to pretend that there are no intellectuals. They are there, whether people are conscious of them, or not.

What Jo Freeman shows is that “structurelessness”, as applied in the Women’s Movement, became a screen behind which women who had advantages of class privilege, derived from the generally class-divided society outside, were able to manipulate the other, poorer and working-class women, so as to preserve their hegemony or dictatorship within these feminist circles.

*“For everyone to have the opportunity to be involved in a given group and to participate in its activities the structure must be explicit, not implicit,”* says Freeman.

Explicit structure means open Rules of Debate, Procedure of Meetings (“Standing Orders”) including notice of meetings, a Constitution, listed membership, minutes, book-keeping, and election of leadership on a periodical basis.

In South Africa, a “Progressive Women’s Movement” (PWM) exists which has no formal structure. Its “Base Document” (not a constitution) says that it is “Organic – not a formal structure”. In practice this means that its decisions are taken by its sponsors, who fund its principal gatherings and by those who maintain it from outside itself. This maintenance is done by the ANC Women’s League.

The first, three-paragraph section of Jo Freeman’s essay, called “Formal and Informal Structures”, is the best of the four sections. It “says it all”. The next three sections are more experiential and discursive. The final section gives some advice on organisation, and one may have different views about the details.

The main thing is that organisation is essential for the working-class women, and for the working class in general. “Organise or starve!” is a good slogan.

In South Africa, the great age of organisation was from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and especially from the founding of the ANC in 1912, up until 1990.

The organisations that still flourish were founded then. Of them, the ANC and the SACP continue to grow, but COSATU has not been growing at the same rate.

In 2003 COSATU adopted its “2015 Plan”, which called for four million members by the time of the 10<sup>th</sup> COSATU Congress, held in 2009. In fact, the membership at that time had barely reached 2 million, and it was very little changed by the time of the 11<sup>th</sup> COSATU Congress, which took place three years later in September, 2012.

On the other hand, since 1990, a large number of NGOs have been established, which, calling themselves “civil society”, or “social movements”, hold themselves

out as the new representatives of the masses – whereas they only represent their bourgeois funders and sponsors.

Internationally, the recent “Occupy” movement was not the first to shoot up on the stony ground of “structurelessness”, only to die away even faster.

What Jo Freeman said, addressing the Women’s Movement forty years or more ago, today remains applicable to all of our activities, and not just to the Women’s Movement.

Conversely, it is clear that much (but not all) of the ideology of the Women’s Movement is only masquerading as feminism, whereas it is actually imported from, and is no different from, the prevailing bourgeois ideology of capitalist society. This is certainly the case with “structurelessness”.

“Structurelessness” has nothing to do with feminism, and everything to do with degenerate “post-modern”, anti-humanist bourgeois philosophy in the service of Imperialism.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Tyranny of Structurelessness, Jo Freeman, 1973.](#)
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Wal Hannington

## Ungendered

The title of the attached document, taken from a 1950 book called “Mr Chairman”, by Wal Hannington, on organisation, is a first-class example of the genderisation of a topic by careless or unconscious use of language.

“Mr Chairman” would seem to be a male. Of course, there is nothing in the book that explicitly states that a Chairperson has to be male.

Game, set and match! Wal Hannington can be found posthumously guilty in the court of Gender, and all his works can be condemned, along with those of countless other writers, especially in the English language, which is, or has in the past been “gendered” in a way that is quite resilient and difficult to avoid. Avoiding “gendered” references of this kind in English takes a will, and constant effort.

But it would be a mistake to throw out Wal Hannington’s work, because in practice it is quite essentially “gender-sensitive”. The book is dedicated to making it possible for anyone to attend meetings without feeling left out, put down, or patronised. It strongly opposes the use of the chair in a patronising way towards the members of the meeting.

The book provides the instruments with which the ordinary members of a meeting are able to intervene and assert themselves in all necessary ways, so as to guide the chairperson, as much as to be guided by the chairperson.

The Chairperson is the main servant of the meeting, and is not the boss of the meeting, says Hannington.

One of the common complaints of feminists who would flee from structure, is that formal meetings are oppressive. They can be, but the remedy is not structurelessness. The remedy is to see how the structure can work, and is well designed to work, in a way that promotes fairness and democracy.

What is oppressive about meetings arises from ignorance of the procedure and of the rules of debate. Wal Hannington (who was a major communist leader in his lifetime) made time to create this work so as to help do away with oppressive and submissive behaviour during meetings.

The attached document is a redaction of the most crucial parts of Hannington's book, as they relate to the most common types of meetings such as Branch meetings of mass democratic organisations.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Rules of Debate and Procedure of Meetings, Hannington, 1950.](#)
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## A Constitution

Any mass democratic organisation must have its Constitution. In this course, we are advocating for mass organisation of women, either as women in general or as working women. Such an organisation will have to have a constitution.

Rather than enumerate what a Constitution needs to contain, we here once again follow the rule of the Communist University, which is to use a real book rather than use a “text book”.

In this case we use the South African Communist Party’s Constitution. It is short, and it is complete with sufficient parts which, suitably adapted, could serve as the model constitution of many different kinds of organisation, including mass organisations. It is exemplary in that way.

We can also note that in the SACP one of the guiding Principles (clause 4.3) is:

*“Organise, educate and lead women within the working class, the poor and rural communities in pursuit of the aims of the SACP; and to raise the consciousness of the working class and its allies around the integral and oppressive nature of gender relations within South African capitalism.”*

And also that one-third of the Central Committee is supposed to be women.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [SACP Constitution, current](#).

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